Good Friend

—“I'm sure that we could find something for you to do on stage

Maybe shake a tambourine or when I sing, you sing harmonies.”

The Front Bottoms - Twin Size Mattress

William punched in the security code and walked into Lego's apartment, the familiar beep a small comfort against the chaos swirling in his chest. The moment the door clicked shut behind him, he was greeted by an expected sight.

Lego was hanging upside down from his pastel pink aerial fabrics, his body suspended in a graceful arc, practicing a slow, controlled stretch. He wore a pink sports outfit—short shorts and a crop top over a sports bra—his long black hair falling in dark waves toward the practice mat below.

At the sound of the door, Lego twisted his body mid-air, catching sight of William's entrance. With a fluid, practiced movement, he released his grip and dropped down to the mat, landing with a soft thud.

"Liam," Lego said immediately, his light-colored contact lenses sharp with concern as he took in William's rigid posture. "What happened?"

William didn't answer right away. He just stood there in the entryway, his broad shoulders tense, his hands curled into fists at his sides.

Lego crossed the space between them in a few quick strides, reaching out to place a hand on William's arm. "Will, talk to me. You look like someone just told you the world is ending."

William let out a heavy breath and walked past Lego, dropping his frame heavily onto the living room floor. He sat cross-legged on the rug, staring blankly at the pastel pink aerial silks still swaying gently from Lego's recent descent.

Lego followed, sitting down across from him, his expression shifting from concern to quiet patience. He didn't push. He just waited.

Finally, William spoke, his voice low and strained. "I just had a long talk with Est. In the studio lounge."

Lego's eyebrows shot up. "Wait, what? You talked to him? About what?"

"About everything," William said, running a hand through his hair. "About how he's been hiding. About how he needs to stop running from the group. About how he needs to be brave and face his fears."

Lego stared at him, his expression shifting from surprise to something sharper—something almost like disbelief. "You told him to be brave," Lego repeated slowly, his voice taking on an edge. "You told Est to stop hiding and face his fears."

"Yeah," William said, not catching the shift in Lego's tone. "I told him that Hong forgives easily. That he just needs to be honest. That the group wants him to be himself."

Lego let out a short, incredulous laugh, shaking his head. "William, do you hear yourself right now?"

William looked up, confusion flickering across his face. "What?"

Lego leaned forward, his voice dropping into something firm and unyielding. "You told him to be brave. You told him to stop hiding behind a mask and be honest with the people who care about him. But you're doing the exact same thing he is."

William flinched. "That's not—"

"Yes, it is," Lego interrupted, his voice rising slightly. "You're hiding behind a fake persona, acting like some wise teacher who has all the answers, while keeping him completely in the dark about who you really are. You told him the group just wants him to be himself, but you're terrified that if he finds out who you really are, he'll hate you or run away. You told him to stop ghosting, but you're acting like a ghost, too."

The words hit William like a physical blow. He opened his mouth to respond, but nothing came out.

Lego didn't let up. "You're both hiding from the exact same night, Will. The difference is, he doesn't even remember it. But you do. And instead of being honest, you're standing there watching him suffer while pretending to be a stranger."

William buried his face in his hands, his broad shoulders hunching forward. "He thanked me, Lego," he said, his voice muffled. "He told me I was a good friend. And it felt like a punishment, Like every word of praise was actually a condemnation because he has no idea who he's actually talking to."

Lego's expression softened slightly, but he didn't pull back. "Of course it did. Because you're not just his friend. You're the person he's been looking for this whole time, and he has no idea."

William let out a shaky breath, his hands trembling against his face. "I don't know how to tell him. How am I supposed to say, 'Hey, I'm the guy you slept with,' without him feeling betrayed that I didn't tell him sooner?"

Lego reached out, grabbing William's wrists and pulling his hands away from his face. "You don't just blurt it out. You explain why you stayed quiet. You tell him the

truth—that you were scared, that you didn't know how he'd react, that you didn't want to lose him before you even had him."

William looked at Lego, his dark eyes filled with a desperate kind of fear. "What if he hates me? What if he thinks I was lying to him this whole time?"

"Then he hates you," Lego said bluntly. "But at least you'll know. At least you won't be standing there torturing yourself anymore."

William shook his head, pulling his wrists free from Lego's grip. "You don't understand. I can't—"

"No, you don't understand," Lego cut in, standing up abruptly. He grabbed his aerial silks, wrapping the fabric around his hands as if grounding himself. "You're torturing yourself, Will. You can't stand being within sixty centimeters of him. If you're too cowardly to tell him the truth, quit your job as his assistant today. Leave. But don't just stand there watching him beg for help while pretending to be a stranger."

The ultimatum hung in the air, sharp and unforgiving.

William stood up from the floor, his hands shaking. "I'm not worried about him feeling betrayed," he said, his voice cracking. "I'm terrified for myself."

Lego's expression softened slightly, but he didn't interrupt.

"I've finally stopped being a ghost, Lego," William continued, his voice breaking. "Thanks to you and Tui, I finally have friends. I finally have people who see me. And I'm terrified that if Est rejects me or looks at me with disgust, I'll spiral right back into the suffocating isolation of my adolescence. I can't go back to that. I can't."

Lego's tough expression melted entirely. He stepped forward, wrapping his arms around William in a fierce, unyielding hug. He even wrapped a bit of the aerial silk around them, cocooning them in pink fabric.

"You won't go back to the dark, Will," Lego whispered against William's shoulder. "Even if Est runs, you have us now. You aren't alone anymore. But you have to give him the chance to choose you."

William's defenses crumbled completely. He let himself lean into the hug, his broad frame shaking slightly as the weight of everything finally hit him.

When they pulled apart, William sat back down on the edge of the practice mat, looking at his large hands. "Fine," he said quietly. "I won't quit the job."

Lego smiled, a small, relieved curve of his lips. "Good. So what's the plan?"

"I'll find the right moment," William said, his voice steadying. "I'll tell him everything. But I need... I need help."

Lego nodded, climbing back onto his aerial silks and settling into a comfortable position. "Then let's get you some help. Tui will be home soon. We'll tell him together, and we'll figure this out as a team."

William let out a long breath, his chest feeling lighter even as his hands still trembled. "Okay. Yeah. Okay."

Lego grinned, spinning slightly in the silks. "And in the meantime, you're helping me make dinner. You're a disaster in the kitchen, but I need the company."

William let out a weak laugh, the sound surprising him. "Deal."

Lego dragged William into the kitchen, determined to distract him with domestic tasks while they waited for Tui to return. Lego handled the wok, expertly tossing vegetables and chicken in a fragrant stir-fry, while William took over the chopping board. He was supposed to be dicing garlic and slicing mushrooms, but his hands were still slightly shaky, and the pieces came out uneven and too large.

"Liam, those are chunks, not slices," Lego teased gently, glancing over his shoulder. "Are you trying to choke us?"

"Sorry," William muttered, focusing harder on the task.

Lego shook his head with a fond smile. "It's fine. Just do your best. We're not trying to impress a Michelin inspector here."

The warm, savory smell of garlic and ginger filled the apartment, mixing with the faint scent of Lego's strawberry cologne. It was comforting—a stark contrast to the heavy weight of the conversation they were about to have.

Just as they were plating the food, the familiar beep of the security code echoed through the apartment. The front door swung open, and Tui walked in, dropping his university bag by the door with a tired smile.

"Hey," Tui said, his voice warm as he stepped into the kitchen. He immediately crossed the space to Lego, wrapping an arm around his waist and pressing a soft kiss to his lips.

Lego responded by standing on his tiptoes, deepening the kiss briefly before pulling back with a grin. "Good day?"

"Long day," Tui said, his eyes shifting to William, who was standing by the counter looking uncharacteristically tense. "But it's better now. What's going on?"

Lego and William exchanged a glance.

"Let's eat first," Lego said, gesturing to the table. "Then we'll talk."

Tui raised an eyebrow but didn't push. He washed his hands and joined them at the table, where the three of them sat down to the simple, comforting meal. For a while, they ate in relative silence, the clinking of chopsticks and the soft hum of the refrigerator the only sounds.

Finally, William set down his chopsticks, his hands gripping the edge of the table. "I need to tell you something, Tui."

Tui looked up, his expression calm but attentive. ""Okay. I'm listening, What's up?"

William took a deep breath. "I spoke to Est today. In the studio lounge."

Tui nodded slowly. "Okay. How did it go?"

"I told him to stop hiding," William said, his voice tight. "I told him to be brave and face the group. To stop running from his mistakes."

Lego cut in, his voice firm. "And then he came here and I called him out for being a massive hypocrite."

Tui's eyes flicked between them, his expression shifting to something more serious. "Explain."

William let out a shaky breath. "The night of that party—the first time Hong brought Est to meet us—I... I fell in love with him. At first sight. I know it sounds ridiculous, but I did. And then, later that night, he was drunk and I—" His voice broke. "I went home with him. We slept together. And now he doesn't remember. At all."

Tui went very still.

"Now I have to work with him and see his face all the time," William continued, his voice thick with guilt. "Pretending to be a stranger. Giving him advice while hiding who I really am. And now he's meeting Hong tonight to apologize, and I'm terrified that the truth is going to come out and he's going to hate me."

Tui didn't speak for a long moment. He just looked at William, his expression unreadable. Finally, he reached across the table and firmly clamped a heavy hand over William's shaking fingers.

"You're finishing this," Tui said, his voice low and steady. "No more waiting for the right moment. No more excuses. You're going to tell him the truth, and we're going to have your back while you do it."

William looked up, his eyes wide with fear. "What if he rejects me?"

"Then he rejects you," Tui said simply. "But you'll survive it. Because you're not alone anymore, Will. You have us."

Lego reached over and placed a hand on William's shoulder. "We're not letting you

spiral, Liam. No matter what happens, we're here."

William felt the tension drain from his shoulders. He looked at his two friends—and realized that Tui was right.

He wasn't alone anymore.

"Eat your food," Tui said, his tone softening. "And then we're going to figure out exactly how you're going to do this."

William nodded, picking up his chopsticks again. For the rest of the meal, they deliberately steered the conversation away from the heavy drama, giving William's mind a brief rest before the storm hit.

Back in his high-end condo, Est lay flat on his back on his charcoal bedsheets, staring blankly at the dark ceiling.

He kept playing the lounge conversation over and over in his head. He remembered the exact moment William had looked at him and said, "Scared people make mistakes, but you can fix this." The more Est repeated those words in his mind, the more his chest tightened.

It wasn't just the advice that stuck with him—it was the low, deep, steady rumble of William's voice. The way he'd looked at Est with those dark, observant eyes. The way he'd moved with that quiet, grounded strength.

Est's heart began to race.

He sat up abruptly, staring at the empty space beside him on the charcoal sheets. A lingering feeling of déjà vu crept over him, something he couldn't quite place. He shook his head, trying to clear the strange sensation, and reached for his phone.

The group chat messages stretched back for weeks—his own silence broken only by the endless stream of their lives continuing without him. He thought about what William had said. About courage. About vulnerability. About the difference between running and being brave enough to stay.

He opened a new message to Hong.

His fingers hovered over the keyboard for a moment before he typed out a short, completely honest apology:

EST: I'm sorry for ghosting. I was scared, but I want to fix my mistakes. Can we meet up?

He hit send before his panic could stop him, feeling a sudden wave of relief. Tomorrow, he thought, the very first thing he needed to do at the studio was find

William and thank him for giving him the courage to do it.

Est barely had time to lock his screen before his phone vibrated aggressively in his hand.

It was Hong. There was no anger in the text—just a time, a location, and a message: Tomorrow night. 8 PM. Our usual spot. Don't back out.

Panic instantly flooded back into Est's chest. But beneath the panic was something else—something fragile.

Hope.

It was nighttime, and William was already in his own apartment when his phone buzzed with a message from Hong in the group chat.

HONG: Meeting Est tomorrow night. 8 PM. Wish me luck.

William stared at the message, his chest tightening.

He couldn't let Hong go into that conversation blind. He couldn't let Est walk into an apology without knowing the full truth. He grabbed his jacket and headed out into the humid Bangkok night.

The rooftop of Nut's apartment building was windy and dark, the city lights sprawling below like a map of every place they'd ever been without each other. Hong was already there, leaning against the concrete ledge, a cigarette dangling from his fingers.

"Liam," Hong said, not looking up. "What are you doing here?"

William stepped out onto the rooftop, the metal door clanging shut behind him. "I need to talk to you. About Est."

Hong turned, his expression shifting to something wary. "What about him?"

William took a deep breath. "I need you to not tell him something tomorrow night."

Hong's eyes narrowed. "What are you talking about? And before that conversation happens, you need to tell me everything. Because I know something is wrong. You've been acting like a ghost around him, and I want to know why."

William sat down on the concrete ledge, burying his face in his hands for a moment before looking up. "The night you brought Est to that party—the first time we all met him—I... I fell in love with him. At first sight."

Hong's expression shifted to surprise. "You what?"

"I went home with him that night," William continued, his voice cracking. "We slept together. And now he doesn't remember. At all."

Hong stared at him, the cigarette forgotten in his hand. "You're serious."

"Yes," William said, his voice breaking. "And I've been hiding it this whole time. I've been pretending to be a stranger, and I don't know how to tell him without him hating me."

Hong's initial anger melted into utter disbelief. He took a long drag from his cigarette, exhaling slowly. "So you're asking me to keep this secret tomorrow."

"Just for one more day," William pleaded. "Let him apologize. Let him fix things with you. And then I'll tell him. I promise."

Hong was quiet for a long moment, staring out at the skyline.

Finally, he walked over and leaned next to William. "We're both cowards, Liam," Hong said quietly. "He was afraid of us, you were afraid of him, and I was too proud to ask. But you have to tell him. Soon."

"I will." William said.

Hong nodded. "Tomorrow I'll keep quiet. I'll let Est apologize, and I'll forgive him. But as soon as he's done, time's up. You drop the formalities and talk to him. Deal?"

William lifted his face from his hands, looking at Hong through the dark, windy rooftop. "Deal."

Hong gave William a heavy slap on the shoulder. "Good. Now go home and get some sleep. You're going to need it." With that, Hong headed down the rooftop stairs, the metal door latching shut behind him.

William sat alone on the ledge, looking out at the city. He knew that when he walked into the studio tomorrow morning, it would be the very last time he looked at Est as a stranger.

The next day, William woke up to a supportive message from Lego wishing him a good day, and a message from Nut congratulating him on his part-time job. It was 11:30 AM. The entertainment studio was a chaotic blur of shouting directors, rolling camera rigs, and the constant, rhythmic snap of wardrobe tape.

William stood at the edge of the set, a heavy garment bag draped over his forearm and a lint roller gripped tightly in his hand. He was the perfect picture of a silent, reliable studio assistant. But beneath his stoic black staff t-shirt, his heart was hammering a frantic rhythm against his ribs.

Every time Est looked over at him with a grateful, trusting smile, the weight of the lie crushed William a little more.

He watched the studio clock move from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM, acutely aware that with every passing minute, the ticking time bomb was getting closer to detonation.

At 3:47 PM, instead of walking toward the hair and makeup stations, Est's eyes instantly scanned the perimeter of the room. When he locked onto William, his face shifted into something softer, more open.

"William," Est said quietly, stepping straight into that excruciating sixty-centimeter boundary that William had desperately been trying to maintain.

The subtle scent of his expensive cologne mixed with the warm scent of the studio lights, a sensory combination that made William's stomach drop. It was a scent that triggered memories—hands, breathing, loneliness.

Est offered a small, genuinely relieved smile. "I did it. I texted Hong last night."

William kept his face completely blank, clamping down on the overwhelming urge to look away. "Did you?"

"Yeah. I couldn't sleep, but I kept thinking about what you said in the lounge yesterday. About being brave." Est leaned in slightly, his voice dropping so the passing crew members couldn't hear. "He replied immediately. We're meeting tonight at eight. I'm terrified, to be honest... but I wanted to thank you. If you hadn't pushed me, I'd still be running."

The words felt like a physical twist of a knife in William's chest.

Est was standing right there, looking at him with absolute trust, completely unaware that the "wise stranger" who gave him courage was the exact person he was running from.

Every ounce of praise felt like a harsh punishment for William's cowardice.

"You don't need to thank me," William said, his deep voice a flat, controlled rumble as he lifted the lint roller to brush a speck of dust from Est's shoulder. His large hand was close enough to feel the warmth radiating from Est's skin, mirroring the exact, careful movements of the night they had shared a bed. "You did the hard part yourself."

Est stared intensely at William's large fingers, his chest tightening as a violent wave of déjà vu washed over him.

"Are you alright?" William asked, his throat tight.

"Yeah," Est whispered, rubbing his temples, his eyes still lingering on William's face

with a strange, searching desperation. "Just...stressed about tonight, I guess."

Est gave William one last, lingering look before turning back toward the flashing cameras.

William stepped back into the shadows of the studio, his hands trembling as he checked the digital clock on his phone.

3:57 PM.

Four hours and thirteen minutes until everything changed.